COVEN

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THEY'RE THE BAND WHO STARTED IT ALL; TERRORIZER DELVES INTO THE STORY BEHIND OCCULT LEGENDS COVEN... WORDS: KIM KELLY

We've all seen the photo by now, whether it was on a record sleeve, in a Google Image result, or plastered across a mate's living room in Finchley. A group of mustachioed henchmen flank a High Priest in red and white, clutching implements of dubious origin and throwing the Sign of the Horns. They're all clustered around the tanned, naked flesh of a breathtaking blonde bombshell who lies draped across the ceremonial altar like a length of red velvet. Fire burns brightly in the corners and in the legend, encircling the words 'Coven' and 'Witchcraft Destroys Minds & Reaps Souls'. This was the world's introduction to the first proudly, openly, and devilishly serious Satanic rock band: Coven. Formed amidst the grunts and grime of working class Chicago, IL in the mid-'60s, the band rose to prominence thanks in no small part to their endlessly charismatic and dangerously bewitching chanteuse, one Jinx Dawson. Her throaty vocals and witchy lyrics left crowds breathless, and the group's occult dabblings had record execs clutching their pearls. The Black Mass included at the tail end of their 1969 debut album (the insert of which we described so lovingly above) was a landmark example of just how deeply Satanism's infiltration of rock music had begun to burrow. Jinx's own magickal roots are buried even deeper.

"I was born into the Left Hand Path," Jinx begins, quoting the lengthy biography posted on her official Facebook page. "My ancestors were secretly against the church and had Magick ceremonies at the Dawson Mansion where I stayed much of the time as a child. I was brought into this world under the Sign of the Goat on a Friday the 13th by a Dr. Jinks. Many decades ago, I became the first rock musick performer to come forward openly as a Left Hand Path High Priestess and Ceremonial Mage. And I was the first to reveal secrets long concealed in esoteric circles (e.g. the horned hand gesture known as 'The Sign of the Horns'). I bear the Sign of the Left Hand Path, an inverted pentacle, in the natural folds of my left palm. I was born into a very long lineage of Occult Adepts and Practitioners of the Ancient Arts. Some of them were members of the U.A.O.D. (United Ancient Order of Druids). Others were members of the Rosicrucian group Ordo Aureæ et Rosæ Crucis (Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross). I am of the Mayflower Society, a direct descendant of John Howland, 13th signator to the Mayflower Compact. Members of my family were also active in Freemasonry. My father was a 33rd degree Scottish Rite Mason, and my grandfather, a former Lt. Governor of Indiana, was High Priest of the Royal Arch Masons. So I am steeped in American illuminati."

She goes on to speak of her initiation into 'the Fold' at the age of 13, and of her fascination with voodoo ("I also gained experience from the Obeahs that worked in the big house. They practiced Hoodoo, so the mix was quite fascinating to me") before launching into the story behind the seemingly innocuous hand sign that is perhaps Coven's most enduring legacy.

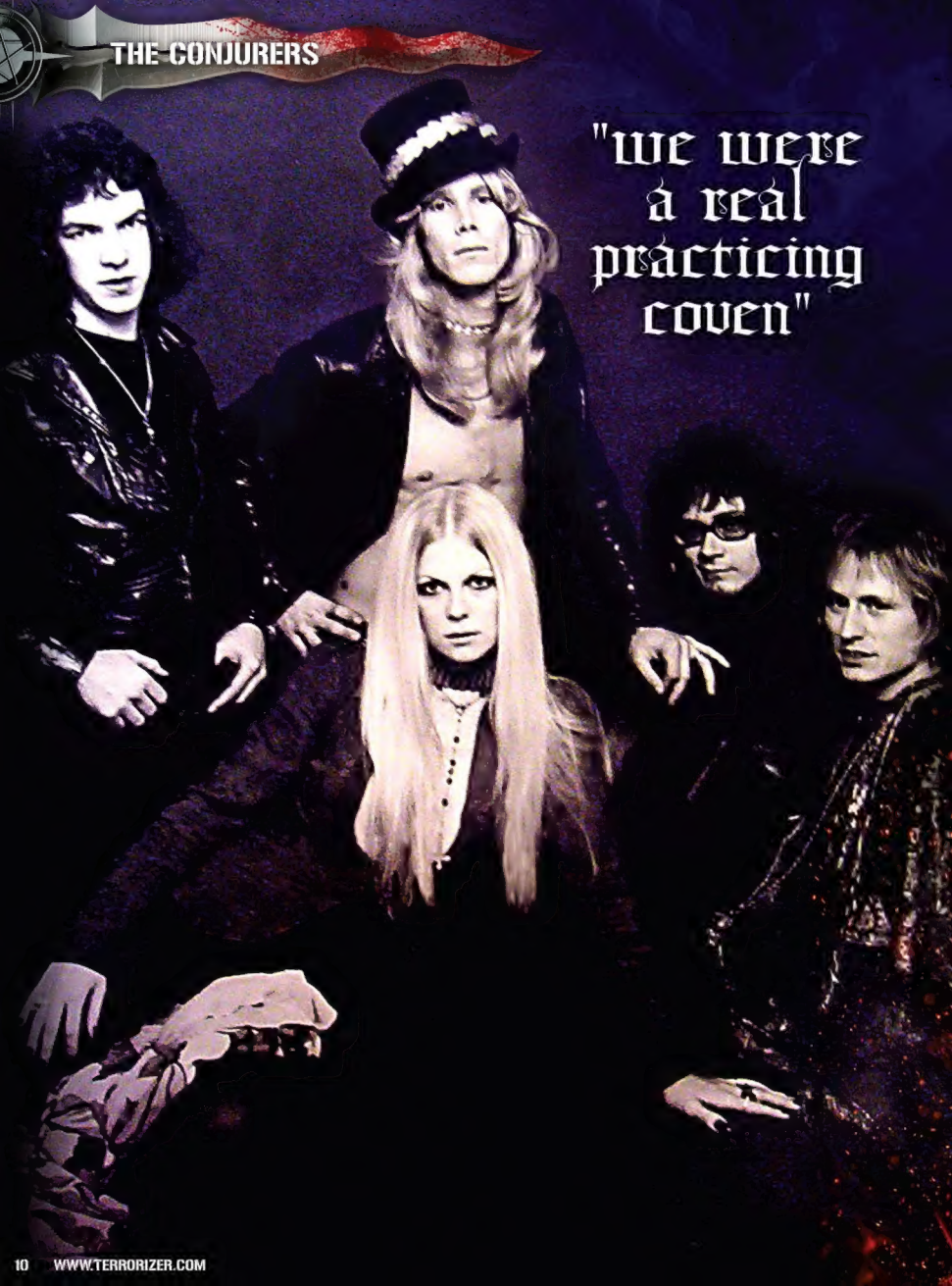
"I was first taught the Horned Hand by my great grandfather and my two great aunts at the Dawson Family Mansion. I was just a toddler. They were all practicing Left Hand Path Magi. The Sign was a very secret hand gesture of recognition, one member to another. Being that they were born in the late 1800s and they learned it from their ancestors, this passed down hand sign kept them safe from uninitiated perpetrators which often tried to infiltrate the LHP ranks and do harm to its members. When the Coven 'Witchcraft' album was released in 1969, the Horned Hand sign was the main bone of contention with my great aunts, thus banishing me from their coven and the family and the Dawson family fortune. I had broken my oath never to reveal the Sign of the Horns. My blood was spilled," she says, a bit mournfully. "It does bother me to see the Horned Hand sign used so ubiquitously. Not only in the music world, but everywhere one looks, films, sports, television advertisements. I did hope back in 1968 when I first revealed my message that many would become illuminated. But I feel now that message has become diluted and sensationalised. And with the thousands of bands that are spreading the message of the Occult and personal freedom, I do hope they are sincere."

"To me, heavy occult music is thought provoking, chilling and disturbing"

Given that the entire focus of this issue is exploring that stated sincerity, we can only hope that Jinx finds a few kindred spirits as she pages through the final result. As it turns out, there are at least a handful of bands featured herein of which she may approve (even if one band of Brummies just might have taken a few liberties with her songtitles).

"I think Ghost is very similar to Coven music," she says, merrily turning my assumptions on end. "They get that eerie, otherworldly lush harmony sound that we conveyed, especially on our third album 'Blood On The Snow'. And I think their stage show and garb is the most similar to the feel we presented beginning back in 1968. And I do not mind being mentioned alongside King Diamond, as he admitted that he directly lifted several lyrics from our albums and used them in his works. Black Sabbath have gained much notoriety for all this and been promoted by their handlers to such a blind reputation for being 'of the fold', and of a practice that they do not even have knowledge of. In this case, imitation is not a form of flattery. It could be quite dangerous. There is a ambivalence in their handling of such content. On one hand they have taken great pains to distance themselves from promoting the 'Black Arts' but on the other hand, they are not above the playing with the imagery to suite their market-driven agenda."

She continues, "But as for many of the other bands that have used the Satanic imagery after ▸


"we were
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Coven, I think it becomes confusing. Some so-called Satanic bands wear Christian crosses, some use the Satanic image as a gimmick to sell product. Some have confused the real meaning of the Horned Hand, as they do not even know what it really means. Left Hand Path is a lifestyle and a Practice, not a religion and definitely not something to be taken so lightly and glib. Many people do not know that Coven presented these images first due to the fact we were constantly getting banned, tours getting cancelled and not much publicity backing because we were a real practicing coven. There was much backlash and fear from the churches and the government when we first came out in 1968 and continuing up through the 1980s. We had constant death threats, even from other secret covens that did not want this information released. The other bands that came up after us were for the most part just dabblers for riches and fame. I grew up in a wealthy family with LHP ancestors, so I actually preferred being underground, my music and message being only for the taste of a few. But when I saw so much misinformation in later years clouding the picture I did get angry. And to be lumped into that fray was never something I felt was illuminating. Unlike later imitations, our debut album 'Witchcraft' was not meant for sensationalism, but rather it was presented with scholarly intent, which is why we included the Satanic Mass. What can any of these music groups present that is any more Satanic than what we presented on our first album 'Witchcraft'? It has all become derivative. To me, heavy occult music is thought provoking, chilling and disturbing. I came from an opera background musically and an LHP background traditionally and intellectually, so I wanted to do an important work, something that had never been done before. 'Tis like comparing the current 'Twilight' movies to the old 'Twilight Zone' series. Both entertaining, but one much more thought provoking and serious...."

If the current crop of 'occult rock/doom/death' bands are the faded monsters lurking under your bed, Coven are the dark force controlling the pitiless thunderstorm wailing outside your window: elemental, merciless, and wild.

"The magick ambiance was always strong [with Coven]. Steve Ross, Oz Osborne, Rick Durrett and I always seemed to fuel an inferno when we were together. People were shocked and would whisper when we would walk into a room. When we toured, if we decided to stop into a roadside station or eatery, heads would turn around at the same time with fear on their faces. But we never got hassled or into a fistfight. The Outlaws Motorcycle Club would sometimes help roadie for us and they were very protective. Back in 1968, we must have seemed wraithlike. I was intrepid as were the other members. I was more fearful of my now passed ancestors than any supernatural entity. Some in my family did not approve of my being in a 'rock band', they likened it to being a court jester. And they did not like me revealing secrets they had passed on to me. I ended up losing my inheritance over the 'Witchcraft' album for breaking my oath. And the consequences of doing something first that was so controversial at the time made me worry that the project and the live stage opera would be banned and forgotten. I was nearly correct. As for rituals, there were a few times our ceremonies went awry. Likewise, Aleister Crowley did not complete the Abramelin rite, and he did not perform the requisite banishing. He did not close the ritual properly. We experienced a similar hostile response."

Despite their '60s pedigree and tour stories from pounding the pavement with The Yardbirds, Alice Cooper, and Vanilla Fudge, as far as Coven were concerned, 'it's only rock'n'roll' was far from the truth. From terrorizing their Mercy Records higher ups with Satanic masses and having their records pulled for 'obscene' content, the Midwestern menace were never far from a fight. The heavy, spacey, otherworldly music they created still stands up today, however, and Jinx's voice echoes soundly within the recordings of countless modern offerings. Their impact is undeniable, and the cult of personality surrounding Jinx herself seems to carry on growing even. Even a simple email exchange makes it very obvious that this is a powerful woman, and her magickal background only lends to her aura.

"Women ultimately make superior Magickians," Jinx opines. "They are natural Magickians, even the ones that do not practice witchcraft. The female monthly cycle directly corresponds to the moon. The fact that women serve as the vessel of creation makes them a microcosmic reflection of the universe. Regarding intuition, women certainly have it over the men. Occult music definitely lends itself to having a female singer. How can you have a witchcraft band without a witch? Hecate is a female archetype. I rest my case."

In 2008, Jinx Dawson suffered a heart attack and near-death experience, and now, five years down the line, she insists that she is "perfect".

"My tubes were cleaned of years of rock and roll and stress. I have another million miles. I was DOA, so this is all just extra Earth time for me. I saw the otherworld and I shall be most embracing when it finally cometh."

As much as she professes to welcome the end, Jinx is one of the few old school rockers who admit to harboring a few long-held regrets, and, in typical Jinx fashion, they center around love, sex, and magic.

"I would probably have stayed in contact longer with my old friend Roger Taylor of Queen. He was the love of my life if I ever was in love. But it was probably just extreme animal lust. As far as my career goes, I should have strangled a few of the people along the way that ripped me off for millions. But I always try to deal with those evils in a metaphysical way."

Though Coven has lain dormant for many years, Dawson is quick to assure me that the silence will soon be broken. She's stayed busy with small acting roles, curating an eBay store through which she sells Coven memorabilia and various occult ephemera, writing a forthcoming book, and corresponding with her many admirers. It's been a while since she's sprawled nude across an altar block, but the lady's definitely still got it.

"I am always writing music for a new album. I am in contact constantly with Rick Durrett and Steve Ross, keyboardist and drummer of the original Coven. We have had many conversations about a new release. Time will tell. I am also in the throes of finishing my book and am constantly manifesting Magick Sigils for commission to bands and private parties. There is a documentary in the works. I regularly perform Magick ceremonies and have much ritual sex. I have been auctioning part of my extensive inverted rosary and ceremonial tool collection at eBay. I really have no blood relatives left to leave them to so I thought passing them on to cherished friends was the best way to preserve them."

With a legacy like hers, it's a wonder Jinx worries about the preservation of a few trinkets, but who are we to question it? Without Jinx Dawson and Coven, none of us would be here right now. Bow the fuck down to the queen of it all. ☠

www.Facebook.com/Jinx.Dawson